Rachel Elior

Rabbi Nathan Adler of Frankfurt and the Controversy Surrounding Him

In the late 1770s and throughout the 1780s, while Hasidism was spreading through Eastern Europe, and while the Frankist-Sabbatian movement was establishing its center in Brunn, Moravia, and in Offenbach, Germany, a distinct group of pietists arose in Frankfurt. The master of this fraternity was Rabbi Nathan ben Simon Adler Nate, who had been born in Frankfurt in 1741 and lived there until his death in 1800.1

During his lifetime Rabbi Nathan Adler was highly esteemed, greatly admired, and much beloved. He was regarded as a man of singular holiness, a Hasidic authority, and a keen scholar, as a charismatic figure, as a fascinating religious innovator, a profound Kabbalist, an ethical model, and as the leader of a pietistic congregation.2 At the same time he aroused controversy and opposition and was persecuted and ultimately excommunicated. The Jewish community of Frankfurt promulgated bans against him and wrote of excommunication in 1779 and 1785, and it permits the composition and publication of a disparaging pamphlet against him in 1790.3

In the following I shall attempt to analyze the background of these communications and the influence of contemporary circumstances on the condemnation of Rabbi Nathan and also to show the common denominator between the pietists of Frankfurt and the Hasidic fellowships of Eastern Europe as it appeared from the standpoint of the controversialists.

1 For biographical information about Rabbi Nathan Adler and his family see Z. B. Amschel, Michael Rabbi Nathan, Frankfurt am Main, 1802, in the introduction [Beresford: "Anwendlich"]; See also A. Y. Ha-Cohen Schwartz, Ovdeyi ha-Naherov see-Toryi Emet, Samutara 1928, p. 4 [Beresford: "Ovdeyi ha-Naherov"].


3 For details see Horowitz, p. 155.
Rabbi Nathan Adler was the child of an old and illustrious family which had dwelled in Frankfurt for generations. He stood out because of his conspicuous intellectual abilities and because of his extremely captivating, charismatic personality. Likewise he was known for his extremely pious and ascetic ways. Along with his intellectual vigor, Rabbi Nathan expressed a deep concern with mysticism and had a tendency towards ecstatic prayer, and in an abiding interest in the study of the Kaballistic tradition, as well as in the creation of a new ritual inspired by it. He was renowned for his dreams and was known to live in the constant tension of divine revelation and prophetic visions as a result of his study of all aspects of the Kabalah. In the early 1770s he founded a House of Study for students of various ages, established a synagogue with his own prayer qurion, and gathered a small congregation of Hasidim around him who were influenced by his piety and erudition, his charismatic personality, his Kaballahistic expertise, his divergence from the accepted norms, and his religious originality. Under his inspiration they engaged in kabbalistic and mystical visions. Members of particular ritual different from generations.

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engaged in Kabbalah, established extreme customs of asceticism and purity, and attributed primary significance to heavenly signs, miracles, dreams and visions. Members of the group prayed in a separate quarter and adopted a particular ritual and separatist religious practice which was comparatively different from that which had been common practice in synagogues for generations. 9

Rabbi Nathan Adler did not leave written evidence nor did he publish books during his lifetime. Therefore, in drawing his portrait and in shedding light on the circumstances of his life we must depend upon the words of his disciples and associates, who testify to the weight of his personality and to his spiritual authority, as well as upon the testimony of his opponents and excommunicators, which reflects the public significance of his fame and authority. In the attempt to decipher the content of these testimonies in the light of the historical meaning which they inherently contain, both implicitly and explicitly, we would like to suggest that the events concerning Rabbi Nathan far surpass the local congregational level in importance and, in fact, reflect a much more widespread phenomenon that exerted great religious and social impact.

The hostile testimony was collected in an anonymous tract entitled 

Kabbalah. Jerusalem 1854, pp. 333-336. R. Efrayim Wessely later became the head of the yeshiva of Breslov. His grandson Abraham Goite, renowned to 609 in Rishonim V, pp. 77-79, 1982, and see Yerushalmi, pp. 126, 236. Rabbi Judah Loew, the author of Zohar ha-Aruch was the head of the rabbinical court of Wrocław between 1576-1595 and had a great influence in southern Germany. Rabbi Mosheh Mendel Goite who lived in Poland, the author of Chidushe Tahan in Melkane, Rabbi Abraham Ausserbii, the father of the author of Midrash Rabbi Nachman, Rabbi Hayyim Dartenheim, the chief of the rabbinical court of Kolno. Moses Halilowski, occupied with his study in the seminary of Lodz, and see Goite op. cit. for information about him. Rabbi Isaac Adish Wessely, known as the BaTzfat of Pidkash, whose biography is given in Toledot ha-Efrayim, ed. Michael, of Michael, The Final Years of Michael Wolst, ed. M. S. Kottman, Jerusalem New York 1973, German ed. Der Rothschild von Weichsain, repr. Basel 1942. Rabbi Joseph Mordechah, who was the chief rabbinical judge of Vienna, author of the 71th Institutions Schneeweiß, Wolf Kaim was the chief rabbinical judge at Crakow, last Wolf, editor and published together with his teacher, Dr. Yisrael Schechter, by the Board of Deputies of the Jews of London, MS Jerusalem National Library 871465, ed. 419, it states regarding him: "May the Lord remember the souls of the famous, holy, and devoted (Rabbi Leib the son of Gimpel) — because in his youth he dragged his legs... he learned sciences... and all of his deeds were for the sake of Heaven and most of his days was occupied with Torah and good deeds... He studied himself and entered for thirty-five and a half years from Kolno to Shabbat... and the man who was pure and scholarly always went from place to place... studying as a maid." After the death of R. Nathan most of his students left Frankfurt. Many of them affiliated as pupils of rabbinical worth in Stockholm and they were deeply inspired by Rabbi Moritz.

9 See Yerushalmi, pp. 153-154, 156.
all described as the acts of the rabbis in the community against Rabbi Nathan and his group. It presents a denunciation of the intentions and actions of the members of the circle, and a one-sided, distorted presentation of a contemporary of the community led to the exceptional steps taken by the community. The main significance of the book lies in the date of its publication, soon after the events under discussion, when those concerned could read, protest, and respond to it. The material presented in the book reflects the attitude of the community towards the controversy and an assessment of the figure of Rabbi Nathan according to the concepts and criteria which were accepted by contemporary opponents. The favorable testimony, reflecting the viewpoint of his congregation, was published later, and is found in the writings of his followers, primarily in the works of his closest disciple, the Haftorat Sofer (Rabbi Moses Sofer of Frankfurt (1762-1840)), and in the biographical traditions which were collected in the book by his grandson, Solomon Sofer, Ha'Ashkenazi Ha-Led (The Triples Thead, Pecs 1887). The enthusiastic assessment, presented from the viewpoint of members of succeeding generations, is found in two books: one by Zvi Benjamin Auerbach, the son of Rabbi Adler's disciple Abraham Auerbach, Meirnun Rabbi Nathan (The Teaching of Rabbi Nathan, Frankfurt 1862), and the other by Abraham Judah ha-Cohen Schwartz, Derech ha-Nesham Ve-Torat Emun (The Path of the Eagle, corresp. on the name Adler) and the Torah of Truth, Sittmar, 1928.

On the basis of these works, Abraham Geiger and Mordecai Honekowitz, Simon Dubnow and Yehiel ben Zechariah Katzen and Mordechai Wilenski 12

12 See Steinschneider, Auser-Makkei, I, 1863, p. 24, and (ibid., I, p. 28), where it is mentioned that the author of this was an I. W. L. W. A. D. E. C. and Benjamin Auerbach, the son of Rabbi Adler's disciple Abraham Auerbach, Meirnun Rabbi Nathan (The Teaching of Rabbi Nathan, Frankfurt 1862), and the other by Abraham Judah ha-Cohen Schwartz, Derech ha-Nesham Ve-Torat Emun (The Path of the Eagle, corresp. on the name Adler) and the Torah of Truth, Sittmar, 1928.

13 See Steinschneider, Auser-Makkei, I, 1863, p. 24, and (ibid., I, p. 28), where it is mentioned that the author of this was an I. W. L. W. A. D. E. C. and Benjamin Auerbach, the son of Rabbi Adler's disciple Abraham Auerbach, Meirnun Rabbi Nathan (The Teaching of Rabbi Nathan, Frankfurt 1862), and the other by Abraham Judah ha-Cohen Schwartz, Derech ha-Nesham Ve-Torat Emun (The Path of the Eagle, corresp. on the name Adler) and the Torah of Truth, Sittmar, 1928.

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19 See Steinschneider, Auser-Makkei, I, 1863, p. 24, and (ibid., I, p. 28), where it is mentioned that the author of this was an I. W. L. W. A. D. E. C. and Benjamin Auerbach, the son of Rabbi Adler's disciple Abraham Auerbach, Meirnun Rabbi Nathan (The Teaching of Rabbi Nathan, Frankfurt 1862), and the other by Abraham Judah ha-Cohen Schwartz, Derech ha-Nesham Ve-Torat Emun (The Path of the Eagle, corresp. on the name Adler) and the Torah of Truth, Sittmar, 1928.

20 See Steinschneider, Auser-Makkei, I, 1863, p. 24, and (ibid., I, p. 28), where it is mentioned that the author of this was an I. W. L. W. A. D. E. C. and Benjamin Auerbach, the son of Rabbi Adler's disciple Abraham Auerbach, Meirnun Rabbi Nathan (The Teaching of Rabbi Nathan, Frankfurt 1862), and the other by Abraham Judah ha-Cohen Schwartz, Derech ha-Nesham Ve-Torat Emun (The Path of the Eagle, corresp. on the name Adler) and the Torah of Truth, Sittmar, 1928.

21 See Steinschneider, Auser-Makkei, I, 1863, p. 24, and (ibid., I, p. 28), where it is mentioned that the author of this was an I. W. L. W. A. D. E. C. and Benjamin Auerbach, the son of Rabbi Adler's disciple Abraham Auerbach, Meirnun Rabbi Nathan (The Teaching of Rabbi Nathan, Frankfurt 1862), and the other by Abraham Judah ha-Cohen Schwartz, Derech ha-Nesham Ve-Torat Emun (The Path of the Eagle, corresp. on the name Adler) and the Torah of Truth, Sittmar, 1928.
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all described Rabbi Nathan, the background to the controversy, and the matter of the tracts and excommunications issued against him. However, these scholars disagreed about the connection between the events leading to the excommunication of the piyut at Frankfurt and other events which occurred close in time and place, such as the anti-Hasidic excommunications published in Eastern Europe.

Most of these scholars doubted that there was any direct connection between the formation of Adler's group and the growth of the Hasidic movement. Nevertheless, one cannot disregard the close relationship between the awakening of Jewish piety at Frankfurt and the formation of Hasidic circles in Eastern Europe. Neither the fact that the group in Frankfurt also called themselves "Hasidim," nor the analogous ways in which both groups departed from the common practices of the community, or the similarity of the charges raised in both the excommunications of Frankfurt and in Eastern Europe, all of which beg for interpretation.

Both the hostile and favorable testimonies show that Rabbi Nathan's aberration from common practice in the name of charismatic authority was largely similar with respect to its spiritual motivation and social significance to the deviations instituted by the Hasidim of the BRUCHI from the traditional patterns and accepted frameworks of the communities in which they were active. Moreover, the persecution in both instances was bound up with fear of both the assertion of the unrestricted authority of men exalted by the holy spirit and the spiritual separation which, in the opinion of the opponents, was derived from it, as we shall see below.

Perusal of the tracts and excommunications issued in 1779 and 1780 along with an examination of the hostile testimony and a comparison with the parallel tradition of favorable testimony, which confirms the facts mentioned but evaluates their meaning differently, elicits five substantial arguments against Rabbi Nathan and his followers.

1. Substantial alternatives in the ritual and in the manner of prayer which led to the creation of a separate prayer qitorut and to isolation from the community.

2. The most prominent arguments related to use of the prayerbook of the ARI according to the Sephardic rite, to recitation of the prayers both in the Sephardic pronunciation and in a deviant manner, as well as to contra-indicating the Eighteen Benedictions of the afternoon and evening services with the benediction normally recited only in the morning in the Ashkenazi rite, "Great peace..." rather than the one beginning "Great peace...".14

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10 See notes above for detailed reference to the works of the scholars cited.
13 See Horowitz, p. 154 and also Rabbi Meir ben Eliezer, Zeror ha-Tor, Amsterdam 1592.
14 See Horowitz, p. 154 and also Rabbi Abraham Loew, Zeror ha-Tor, Amsterdam 1592. Zemel ne-Sheva-Nevi'im, see also Abraham Elijah Jacob Mieloch, Zemel ha-Tor.
2. Notable except in asceticism and fasts, is abstention, and in severity regarding undue insistence on the laws of purity and impurity. This led to the prohibition of eating and drinking with those not belonging to the group for fear of violation of kashrut, to separation from it for fear of impurity, and to condemnation by the community which continued to follow the common practices. 15

3. Change in religious practice with respect to prevalent custom. This included a different circumcision ceremony, the wearing of two sets of phylacteries, the attachment of ritual fragrances to women's garments, and the recitation of the priestly blessing every day. 16

4. Change in the standard patterns of sacred and secular times, independent determination of the times that holidays and festivals begin, and the assertion of freedom to determine the calendar.

5. Study of the Kabbalah, concern with dreams, secrets, and prophetic visions while claiming an immediate relationship with the upper worlds and knowledge of hidden things. These preoccupations drew dread within the community. 17

Most of the charges leveled against Rabbi Nathan and his group were similar to those raised seven years previously in polemical writings and excommunications issued against the Hasidim of Eastern Europe. 18 The similarity in the polemical description of the idiosyncratic practice derive from the negative assessment of features stemming from a common tradition, the Kabbalistic tradition, which draws upon the mystical inspiration and charismatic leadership prevalent among both the Hasidim and other pietists throughout the Period. The position represented by Rabbi Nathan Adler was essentially individualistic, as opposed to that of the traditional community, where there was generally no opportunity for non-conformist individuals and groups to exist and act in freedom without depending upon the traditional socio-religious frameworks. Accordingly, the Kabbalistic Hasid does not need supportive confirmation from the congregation for his stance before God. Nor is he required to observe the details of the tradition in the prevalent fashion. 20

Bux rather, he his religious authority a ecstasy [state]. Rabbi Nathan perceived them as experts of the Hasidim in a community in which drew up visions or new the rabbis were continuing to as they instigated a force of charismatic community or a charismatic process those changes. Kabbalistic mystic assertions of free all of the changes were insinuous on the customs and in which attributed commandment to the mystic mediators up the idiosyncratic practice of inspiration, and

The Kabbalah 19 century amongst the works and in it from the late-sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth among societies.

15 See Nishan Tsiyon, pp. 9-10 and cf. Greenwald introduction, p. 8 and see Hebrew He- 


18 See Korczak, pp. 154, 157, 155, and Wajszc, l, pp. 46-49. The excommunication of Hev- 

19 See Bux, pp. 15, 157, 1, and of Wajszc, l, pp. 46-49. The excommunication of Hev- 

20 See the note on the influence of the Hasidic by Hayim Volkie, Kabbalistic by Joseph 

18 See Bux, pp. 15, 157, 1, and of Wajszc, l, pp. 46-49. The excommunication of Hev- 

19 See Bux, pp. 15, 157, 1, and of Wajszc, l, pp. 46-49. The excommunication of Hev-
abstinence, and in severity of piety. Living with those not belonging operation from it for fear of which continued to follow to prevalent custom.

Rabbi Nathan's group entered the Hasidic circle by the Saphiric route from the yere, and for tradition in creating disparaging with polemical knives.

But rather, he is permitted to inaugurate a new religious ritual, drawing upon his religious inspiration and the Kabbalistic tradition or based on the authority of a renewed revelation granted in a vision, dream, or spiritual ecstasy (alloy ha-meshumah)

Rabbi Nathan and his group, like the Hasidim in Eastern Europe, did not perceive themselves as deviants or enemies. Rather, they viewed themselves as exponents of the Kabbalistic tradition, not subject to the authority of the community in spiritual matters. They advocate a perspective of values which drew upon Kabbalistic literature and was based on the authority of the Hasidim or renewed revelation. Hence they did not acknowledge the authority of the rabbis who excommunicated them. They ignored the excommunications, continuing to act in their own way. From their point of view, the alterations they instilled had been made in the spirit of the Kabbalistic ethos with the force of charismatic inspiration, and they did not require the agreement of the community or its leadership. However, it was not only the force of the charismatic personality or the outcome of mystical ecstasy which stood behind these changes. They derived primarily from penetrating scrutiny of the Kabbalistic mythos, the adoption of its conceptual system and from the assertion of freedom of ritual creativity in its name. The structure common to all of the changes in the prayer ritual, in the severity of the asceticism, in the insistence on the laws of purity, and in the innovations which were made in customs and in the order of time were all anchored in a Kabbalistic ethos which attributed mystical intentions to the prayers and to the performance of commandments in a manner which bound the text of divine service with the concepts of the Kabbalah and its hidden dimensions. Profound meditation upon the meanings of the Kabbalistic tradition shaped the idiosyncratic practices of the piestic Hasidim, wove their charismatic inspiration, and sustained their contexts.

The Kabbalistic ethos which was crystallized in Safed during the sixteenth century among the "Holy Fellowships"15, is expressed in Kabbalistic ethical works and in the literature of the Lurianic T uploads. It was disseminated from the late sixteenth century, throughout the seventeenth century, until the mid-eighteenth century among groups of Kabbalists and ascetics and also among societies of Safaitians and Hasidism.16 These circles delved deeply

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16 See Devor, pp. 159-160. The publication of Zekiyoth za in 1923 had a decisive influence on the creation of the Kabbalistic ethos, books such as Shem Shem Kadishah by Rabbi Hayyim Vital, Megadl ha-Megulah by Jacob Emden, Supers-Dibriden by Eliezer Azikri, and Maggid-Mishbereth by Joseph Zarno also had a great influence in consolidating the ethos of Kabbalistic customs.
into the intention which binds the performance of a commandment and the underlying reason for having Kabbalistic concepts and dimensions, which are connected to the higher realms. For that reason they were preoccupied about the minutest details of religious practice, and set aside separation and isolation and insisted on separate prayer and ritual slaughter and on pietistic and ascetic practices inspired by the Lurianic doctrine of intentions, the Kabbalistic doctrine of reincarnation, and other mystical teachings. All of these customs and teachings, which initially pertained to therapeutic intentions concerning Ge'ulat ha-Shabbathah, were also meant to prepare the way for mystical exaltation and the attainment of the holy spirit on its various levels of dreams, visions, revelations, celestial voices, and prophecies.21 The new customs which they inaugurated and the instructions which they committed to writing were a matter for an elite and did not obligate the entire community.22 On the contrary, the esotericism which characterized these circles of ascetics, saints, and pietists and the spiritual and moral height that characterized their adopters created a set pattern of relations of distance and sanctity, of separation and seclusion, which were accepted and honored by the community, so long as the changes in religious ritual and customs of prayer which were directed towards achieving mystical elevation remained outside the public realm. However, in the second half of the eighteenth century a change began to take place in the status of esotericism following the extensive printing of Kabbalistic literature, on the one hand, and under the influence of the Haidic, Sebastian-Frankist, and Kabbalistic sects, on the other.23 The spread of the influence of these esoteric and mystical ideas into constantly enlarging circles caused social ferment and undermined the communal hierarchy, for the exceptional influence of the bearers of spiritualistic views upon community life and the circle of their influence was far greater than their actual numbers. The feeling of instability and the precariousness of the accepted tradition, which contributed to the weakening of the status of the congregation in the matters of spiritual leadership, led the community into conflict. Viewing itself as representing the values of the Halakhah and the religious tradition and as responsible for preserving the

22 The concepts haveger, Aray ulah (demonic force), yegozet umagez and beresh qedeshah all inculcate seclusion and isolation.
23 On the printing and circulation of the literature of Lurianic Tikkunim in the late seventeenth century and in the second half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the Kabbalistic change and its influence see Z. Grau, Light ha-Shabbathah, Jerusalem 1990, intro. pp. 30-101; 41-105.

traditional structure of pietistic conduct. It derived legitimacy. However, when the idea took a dim view of the alterations, by the authors of recent innovations founded upon the tradition which had long been. That is to say, the use upon alteration of application and definition separate prayer and separate customs of ritual upon absorption in Kabbalah and the new explicitness in concern with other holy frameworks of permission and application of new norms both ways and led to the coexisting intervention. However, removed the idea of the known, and some of change also occurred in a deepened country tradition, which led to innovation in customary accepted order, and a few new norms were required by authority and as a result so on. In For such a 24
commandment and the dimensions, which are a punctilious about the words separations and qualities, and on pietistic lots of intentions, the local teachings. All of a theurgical intentions to prepare the way for it in various levels prophecies. The New method they committed to oblate the entire characteristic these and moral height that stories of distance and oped and honored by ritual and customs of of elevation remained alike of the eighteenth conventions following the hand, and under the spiritual societies, on the and ascetic mystical order and determined of the bearers of of their influence was of instability and the aid to the weakening and leadership, led the rising of the values of the life for preserving the

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traditional structure, the community fought against the broad expansion of the pietistic conduct. For as long as these had been the customs of an elite which derived legitimation from the community, they were viewed with approval. However, when idiosyncratic particularity became widespread, the community took a dim view of it.24

The alterations, non-conformism, and deviations which were condemned by the authors of the anti-Masada communications were not generally recent innovations of the 1770s and 1780s. Rather, almost all of them were founded upon the Kabbalistic tradition and the pietistic, ascetic customs which had long been prevalent among circles of Kabbalists and holy societies. That is to say, the change did not hinge upon the content of the innovations or upon alteration of religious practice, but rather upon the widespread application and dissemination of these changes. Innovations such as holding a separate prayer quorum, use of the ARI nite, wearing white clothing, special customs of ritual slaughter, a tendency towards asceticism and insistence upon abstinence in sanctity and purity, along with intensive study of the Kabbalah and the assumption of freedom to innovate rituals are mentioned explicitly in connection with members of the Kloz of Brody and also those in other holy fraternities in other places in Europe, which acted with the permission and agreement of the various communities.25 As noted, as long as these changes took place within the closed realm of an elite and did not spread to the community beyond its confines, the community did not intervene. However, from the moment when the esoteric barriers were removed and the idiosyncratic customs of the holy societies became widely known, and some of the separatist circles began to appeal to a broad public, a change also occurred in the position taken by the communal leadership. The despised contemplation of religious worship and renewed illumination of the tradition, which led to the establishment of original religious patterns and to innovation in customs were grasped as a threatening divergence from the accepted order, a deviation which demanded an appropriate response. The new agents were viewed as a threat in existing practice and to accepted authority and as a blow to the values of the congregation.

In ma'asch Ta'av'um, which, as noted, was written in Frankfurt in 1790,

the author interprets the separatism entailed by changes in custom and the freedom expressed in ritual innovations as rebellion against the accepted authority and as impugning the ways of the community.

For they have invented new laws for themselves and intend to rebel against the Rabbis. They slandered the Jewish people, their brothers, and ruled against our bread and wine, not to eat of our food and not to drink of our wine, and not to use our vessels, and never to mingle with us, for fear lest they be contaminated by our bread or by the wine of our libations, for we are regarded as Samaritans by them and as Karaites we appear in their eyes.

The excessive scrupulosity regarding purity and impurity, the exaggerated pietty, and the restraint from abstinence which is derived from these were viewed as arrogance and separatism, as an insult and criticism. Separatism in the prayer ritual, in its place and time, as well as the insistence upon separate food, on different manners of dress and behavior - all these practices, which were initiated for the purpose of sanctification, mystical elevation, and attaining the holy spirit, were interpreted as a threat to the prevalent hierarchy of values and as a challenge to the Halakhah and to the tradition represented by the community.

An interesting expression of the opposite point of view, that of the meekness of the separate prayer quorums, is found in the writings of Rabbi Nathan Adler's contemporary, published about the same time as the group's first excommunication in response to the arguments of those who were offended by separatism.

"It emerges from this, thus in the same manner Israel was separate and secluded from the multitude in two ways: when eating, they would not eat the same food with them; and also that they would not be mingled with them, only that they should be secluded in the clouds of Israel and not mingle with the mixed multitude. Why should you make a seclusion from us and pray and study by yourselves, and also not eat our food? I myself, my eyes and not a stranger, have seen this war that is always waged against him who wishes to be sanctified and to seclude himself and pray in a quorum of his own, since it is impossible to pray in a public where they pray out of routine habit, and for several similar reasons. In the matter of eating, this generation cannot be trusted, since anyone may slaughter, even someone who is not expert in the laws of slaughtering and does not fear heaven... and certainly anyone who withdraws from the food of the world must be considered holy, because there are not many people expert in the laws of eating, and certainly someone who wishes to be sanctified will not sit at their table... and it is a sign for all generations that the pre-eminent worshipper should form a separate quorum with particular people..."
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and also not eat with the masters at the same table at all... and the sign for all generations is that they should make a House of Study for select individual Jews, who will be separate from the masses of the people, for it is impossible that they should be together.26

The writer of Rabbi Jacob Joseph ha-Cohen of Polonynski, who published this work in 1780 after his effort to maintain simultaneously both the Kabbalistic ethos of withdrawal and separation and the status of the rabis of a congregation, as effort which met with failure and ended with his discharge from the rabinate of the community of Shargrund.27 He interprets the Biblical story of the children of Israel and the multitude as an allegory of the relation between the groups of Hasidim and recluses who pray separately among themselves, on the one hand, as against the whole community, which argues against them and disputes them, on the other hand. Sanctification and elevation are made conditional upon isolation and seclusion from the surrounding world, for the religious norms prevailing in the traditional community were insufficient in the view of the circles of pietistic Hasidim, who viewed the prayer, ritual slaughter, and conduct of the congregation, at least according to the testimony of Rabbi Jacob Joseph, as the practices of the rabis.

On the strength of independent and unlimited spiritual authority, the pietistic Hasidic circles instituted alterations in matters of ritual purity, ritual slaughter, circumcision, and phylacteries, and they asserted autonomy in determining the calendar and setting the hour when sabbaths and festivals began and ended. These changes were viewed as a manifestation of sectarianism and were interpreted as rebellion against the authority of the community. The community leadership set out to block spiritual separatism and use communication to re-establish and strengthen its authority. It defined those who rejected its authority as a sect and demanded their excommunication.

The Community Register of Frankfurt28 records the wording of the proclamation issued in the synagogue in the month of Elul, 1779:

[In Hebrew:] Beloved, [in Yiddish:]isten gentlemen, I have been ordered [in Hebrew:] to proclaim in the name of [in Aramaic:] the holy congregation, may the Lord bless it and keep it, [in Hebrew:] in conjunction with the Lord warden, may the Lord bless and keep them, that it is forbidden to the master of Torah, his honor the Rabbi, Rabbi Nathan the son of our Rabbi Simon Adler Katt, and to the master of Torah, Rabbi Lister Walz to form a quorum...
of ten to pray in their home, and any member of our congregation who
went to their house to pray in their house is a quorum whether a householder
or other member of our community, he is excommunioned and banished.29
The congregation's power of coercing and ability to exert authority over
its members was ineffective, as we see from the following document in the
register:

Inasmuch as the aforementioned Torah scholar Rabbi Nathan ben Simon
Adler Katz did not heed the ruling of the congregation and the wardens, may
God bless and keep them, and did not obey the proclamation which
was publicly proclaimed in the synagogue and once again gathered a quorum in
his house to pray, against the ruling of the congregation and the wardens, may
God bless and keep them, in conjunction with the Chief Justice, long may he
live, and two courts, may God bless and keep them, it was agreed to send
[instructions] to the aforementioned Rabbi Nathan not to pray with any
quorum at all except in synagogues which have permission from our
congregation, excommunication is proclaimed in the following wording,
which we sent to him: The aforementioned Rabbi Nathan is proclaimed
excommunicated and no one is to pray in a quorum of ten with him. Today is
the eleventh of Elul 1779.30

The Community Register reflects fervent and dissent regarding the
multiplicity of synagogues and private prayer quorums. In 1787 nine private
quirums are mentioned in the register.31 And in 1790 the author of Ma'achen
Ta'asur condemned some of them in bastard language, calling Adler's quorum
a sect: "When that sect began to do evil and sin.32

The changes and alterations in religious customs which took place among
the Kabbalists and Hasidim because of spiritual and mystical motivations,
giving rise to their spiritual separatism, proved retrospectively to have been of
weakened social significance.

The pietistic Hasidic circles were viewed as sects both in Eastern and
Western Europe because they saw themselves as fellowships of pious persons
whose way demanded social segregation, and because they were viewed as
rejecting the community from which they had emerged. The remarks of the
author of Ma'achen Ta'asur describing the group around Rabbi Nathan are
consistent with this conception. Since the Hasidim viewed the customs of the
community as unsustainable, according to the testimony of this group's
opponents, the self-imposed social separation was perceived as a barrier
between the members of the group and the rest of the community. From the
point of view of those members of the community who condemned Rabbi

29Register of the Frankfurt community, fol. 259a.
30Ibid., fol. 259a.
32Ibid., p. 27.

33Nahman, unaccurate
34See the
35The prevailing
36The Hasidic
37One should

Nathan, a
their own
Kabbalist
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procedures.
The piety and the rigid
Sabbatian
sects were deemed
the enemies
For their
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Nathan, the meaning of the claim that the manners of the community were unacceptable to him and his group was that they attributed absolute validity to their own manner of serving God, thereby challenging the validity of the traditional ways of the community; however, from their own point of view, the members of the group regarded themselves as the bearers of the Kabbalistic tradition. Thus they were not subject to the rule of the community in spiritual matters, and they were obliged to raise a barrier between the congregation and themselves in order to conserve the Kabbalistic ethos in proper fashion.34

The great tension between the members of the separate prayer quorums and the community leadership grew stronger against the background of the prevailing view, which saw their exaggerated piety as a distinct sign of the Sabbatian movement 35 That is to say, the opponents suspected that behind the facade of sanctity and abstinence of the separatist prayer quorums were decepions, lies, and trickery intended to undermine the foundations of the existing order.

For that reason the opponents of transmigration in Eastern Europe tried to accuse the Hasidic circles of belonging to the Sabbatian movement in its various guises, to define them as a sect, and to persecute them ruthlessly.36

34 On the external manifestations of the spiritual orientation and the implications entailed in it see Nadler, p. 513.
35 See G. Scholem, "Talmudic Re-Examination of Works," in Mekorot va-Metoriot be-Toldot ha-
Chashma be-Or Averayim, Jerusalem 1974, p. 80; cf. M. Bialik, Se-TeIzlul be-Toldot ha-
Prophetim, Tel Aviv 1934, pp. 53-66.
36 One should note the remarks of the author of the Zohar, who was the leader of the Sabbatian movement of 1772: "When the above lamented one [in Besa] were misunderstood by others, etc... and upon hearing that the congregation which broke not accept any app raises not been extinguished and that band of evil-doers will never remain any longer (a few months)" (Bialik, p. 139). However, he remains to be in error, for the remarks most probably refer to the circle of Sabbatian and Frankist Hasidim who were excommunicated in Besa in 1732, 1753, 1756 and 1760. The language of the excommunication is the same, "ones again sentenced to imprisonment and torture/one month." I believe one remarks most probably refers to the Hasidim in Besa in the previous decades. I believe that the Besa was wrong in claiming the importance of the excommunication which proved futile for excommunication. See Besa, p. 134. Even after the excommunications of 1737 and 1753 most Sabbatian Hasidim remained within the Jewish community. See G. Scholem, Mekorot va-Metoriot, p. 136.
The fate of Rabbi Nathan, too, was influenced to a great extent by the Sabbatian-Frankist threat, for at that time the distinction between the Hasidic pious, the Sabbatian Hasidim, and the Frankist Hasidim were increasingly blurred, and many manifestations of separatism which originated with a separate prayer quorum was suspect, becoming the target of attacks and excommunication if it did not receive the explicit approval of the community and the authorization of its leadership.

Various testimony points to manifestations of tension between the pietistic Hasidic circles and the traditional leadership throughout the eighteenth century. It seems that since the mass conversion of the Dohnene in 1683, the Eybeschutz-Emden controversy and the unprecedented conversion of the Frankists in Lvov in 1759, all pietistic spirituality was suspected of being assimilationist, and the various circles of Hasidics were thought to hold heterodox beliefs and strange deeds, as it emerges from various accounts. However, it appears that the identification of the Sabbatian-Frankist groups with the various Hasidic circles was not unequivocal in the consciousness of the religious and social authorities until the 1770s, the years when excommunications against the Hasidim began to be pronounced in Eastern Europe, including the first writ of excommunication against Rabbi Nathan Adler and the members of his circle.

It does not appear that the proclamation of the writs of excommunication in both Eastern and Western Europe in the 1770s has yet been linked to a complex of critically important events which took place at the same time and which left its threatening mark upon the Jewish world. I refer to the Sabbatian activity at the end of the 1760s and to the travels of Jacob Frank (1726-1791) throughout Eastern and Western Europe after he was freed from imprisonment in Cracow in 1772, when he began the systematic dissemination of his doctrines by means of emissaries, reports, and books.

The letter of Yeruham ben Hananah Lipmann of Crakow, Solomon ben Rabbi Eliahu Shor, the Kabbalist of Rohatyn, and his brother Nathan Nego on the life of Frank and on his doctrine which was published by Abraham Jacob Brownstein explicitly states:

Also upon his departure from Cracow in 1772 he sent us the underwritten, to several towns, such as Lublin, Lvov, and Brod.

36 Ibid, n. 4 above and cf. Pielotzki, Dr-Yehezkel ha-Hasidim, pp. 310, 324-326, 331-338.
38 See Brownstein, p. 275.
and to the other cities, on a mission from him to announce to all those who feared the Lord so as to know that the time will come when all the Jews will be forced to convert. For the decree is from God alone, be it in whatever way it may be, and whoever comes in the shelter of faithfulness to the house of the God of Jacob, the God of Jacob will help him, so that he shall not be lost forever, for in his shadow we shall live among the nations.

According to the accepted historical view, Franz was released from prison in the summer of 1772, when Czarnoscławi was captured by the Russians. According to the Frankist chronicle, Jacob Frank was set free on January 21, 1772(113) and traveled through various places in Poland, Moravia, and Valachia. His journey caused a spiritual awakening and waves of conversion, arousing increased suspicion against all Hassidic circles and separate prayer questions. It also might have led to the imposition of excommunication against those in the consciousness of the opponents the common component between the priest Hasidim, the Hasidim of the Books, and the Sabbathist- Frankist Hasidim was greater than the substantial differences among them.

The author of Jot ha-Mishnah, the grandson of the Hatam-Sofar, described the background of Rabbi Nathan’s excommunication in these words:

At that time the country was full of noise and turmoil; and the war against the Hasidim grew stronger in the lands of Poland and Russia; and the Goren, Elijah of Varna of blessed memory, and with him other great Jewish Sages, sent preachers to all of the great Jewish communities, telling them to persecute the Hasidim and to do battle against them, for changing their pronunciation and changing the words of the prayer and other established practices. And the great Jewish leaders especially feared changes and innovation at that time, because then the sect of Shabbatov Zevi, may his name be blessed out, ruled, and did damage and destruction in Poland and Germany, and the members of that sect also edited books of Kabbalah with hints and methodology, cloaking themselves in the garments of the priests.

And it was not clear whether they belonged to the Zevi-ites, whose name gave forth bitter woodwork to the Hasidim, who held true faith in their hearts, and they feared the Zevi-ites, who were similar to the Hassidim. Since they saw in the practices and ways of the followers of Rabbi Nathan Adler of blessed memory several things which were similar to the practices of the Hassidim, and they did not want these things to spread in their city and state, they therefore sought to prevent these people from [do]ing this, and in Prague the rabbinical court at that time forbade any study of the Kabbalah for that reason. (103)

(113) See Levinsohn, p. 76.
(103) [Yehuda Ha-Levi, p. 29; cf. the wording of the pietist against studying Kabbalah because the Frankists-Ashkenazim oppose secret doxology. In Y. Scholem, Madagascar-Ashkenaz, p. 122-138.]
All of the Hasidic circles, both the scientific and reclusive groups and the followers of the REBISHT, as well as the Sabbathists and Frankists, formed their worldview under the inspiration of the Kabbalistic tradition, and they consolidated patterns of thought and practice which were decisively influenced by Kabbalistic ethical literature and its mystical-visionary trends. Because of this, the changes in widely accepted customs which were wrought by various circles of Hasidism, and the alterations which characterized them in their methods of divine worship, along with their tendency towards charismatic inspiration and authority, were too similar in the view of those observing them from without to permit clear distinctions to be made between the circles remaining faithful to the traditional values and those which deviated from them.\(^{41}\) The community leadership, which had to struggle against the renewed Sabbatian heresy did not delve deeply into these differences but rather took a general negative position regarding all of the piety groups which acted without the agreement and permission of the community.

The presence of the Frankists in Poland and Galicia, in Russia and in Moravia throughout the 1770s,\(^{42}\) aroused tension and fear and a feeling of precariousness. Indeed, the number of those who were bound to the Sabbatian-Frankin movement in various ways, from being secret supporters to open apostates, was too great not to leave a mark. The leadership swore to constrain this social deviation and to expel the rebels who, by their actions and behavior, damaged the values of the community. Excommunication was the principal means used to establish the boundaries of the congregation’s common identity and to erect a barrier against spiritual separatism in all its varieties, from ascetic piety through ecstatic mysticism to antinomianism.

It is not implausible to postulate that the letters and emissaries which Frank sent to his supporters and devotees in the city of Buda in the early 1770s\(^{43}\) could have direct or indirect influence on the enthusiastic participation of the leaders of that community in the anti-Hasidic excommunications of 1772.\(^{44}\) In any event, the Gaon of Vilna is known to have excommunicated the Hasidim in that year because he believed that “the sect of Hasidim” comprised “many heretics from the sect of Shabatay Zevi,” as it is quoted in his name in Shevar Peshim, the anti-Hasidic pamphlet\(^{45}\) ineffectively.

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\(^{41}\) See O. Scherman, Meburekh a-Dagah, pp. 113-115.
\(^{42}\) See Levene, pp. 29.
\(^{43}\) See Biurok, p. 272, and cf. evidence regarding the rise of members of the sect in Warsaw from 1770 quoted in O. Scherman, Meburekh a-Dagah, p. 137.
\(^{44}\) See Wiznitz, l., pp. 44-45, and in 35 above.
\(^{45}\) See ibid., pp. 198, 202.
pamphlet. For their part the Hasidic leaders protested angrily but ineffectively against being included among the Sabbatian heretics.

If we may assume that the post-relationship of the anti-Hasidic writings of excommunication of the 1770s was influenced by the Frankist eminences dispatched throughout Europe at the end of the previous decade, by Jacob Frank’s travels during the early 1770s, and by the ferment that was aroused in his wake, then in all likelihood these writings of excommunication directed against the Sabbatian-Frankist heresy exerted an indirect influence on the first ban against Rabbi Nathan and his circle. Jacob Frank’s decision to settle in Offenbach, just across the river from Frankfurt, in 1747, certainly possessed significance with respect to the second writ of excommunication issued against Rabbi Nathan’s group in 1789.

During the 1780s the Frankfurt community struggled against Rabbi Nathan and his green, while at the same time the Sabbatian-Frankist threat grew ever more serious. At the end of the decade, Frank had gathered hundreds of followers in his stronghold in Offenbach and his supporters everywhere were numbered in the thousands. These developments cannot have exerted a moderating influence on the struggle, but rather they led to the second writ of excommunication of 1789, which went beyond the preceding writ in its extremity. In presenting and exceptional trait in the policies of the 1780s is the place occupied in the proclamations and excommunications by the dreamers and prophetic visionaries who were common in Rabbi Nathan’s circle; the reasoning shows the great importance attributed by the members of the community and of the circle to dreams and their influence.

For they began to terrify the people with their dreams and to frighten them with the lies of their visions, and this is the sum of their wisdom and understanding: to arouse the power of their imaginations while they lie prone upon their beds, and whoever dreams the most is the most preeminent in their society.

The dreams were grasped by Rabbi Nathan’s circle as visions, prophetic revelations, knowledge of the future, and direct contact with upper worlds. But by the community leaders they were viewed as deceivers and frauds.

45 Ackert, Th., s.v. 46 See Wlosok, J., pp. 176-179, and cf. the index under “Rabba’im.” See also L. J. Halman, pere
47 See Levine, p. 100, and note the introduction by Derscheid to Mitnachot Yisrael, p. 8.
50 Me’anei Yisrael, p. 17.
manipulative means of influencing the masses. The second reemphasis, of 1798, is, as noted, entirely devoted to that matter:

Those tens which were written in the Community Register and announced publicly in a proclamation in the synagogue in 1779, which have already been spoken repeatedly, prominently, with full force and power, it is additionally appended to all of these, so that those false prophets and their like should no longer continue to frighten and terrify the people. 52

It goes on to state that it is strongly forbidden:

for any man in the world to transform and frighten and terrify and to make wind [flying spirits] with their dreams and night and various visions and seductions, since this sect has already made people act wickedly and sin. Hence the dreamer of dreams is to be rejected and hunted and retracted and set apart from all holy Jewish ceremonies. 53

Rabbi Nathan's group could have based its practices upon a rich Kabbalistic literature that attributed decisive importance to dreams. The Zohar views the dream as a revelator granted to the soul from the world of angels and interprets the dreams of the righteous as clear in essence to prophecy. A good deal of the Kabbalistic literature of the sixteenth century was written under the inspiration of dreams, visions, and illuminations possessed by certain revelations. Books such as Gikudei-Rinoc, Hayyakim, Megged-Mishake, and Sheer-Ma'onah publicly disseminated the authority of dream and vision and determined their significance as celestial revelations and as a sign from the upper world. 55

The various Hasidic circles in Eastern and Western Europe, drawing upon the heritage of Kabbalistic literature, attributed great importance to dreams, interpreting them as an expression of generation beyond the confines of time and space, of immediate contact with upper worlds, and of acquiring the holy spirit - goals which the entire Kabbalistic, ascetic, and ecstatic ethos was directed to achieve. Concepts such as stripping away of corporeality, deification of being, she'elat hakat (questioning through a dream), ascent of the soul, cleaving to God, ecstatic enthusiasm, and ascension, the revelation of En Sof, and even spells and the use of the holy names were widespread in all of the piestotic circles. These formed a conception of the world which acknowledged the power of visionary authority drawing upon contact with upper worlds. Further, this conception gave rise to charismatic sources of inspiration and vested those who were endowed with these contemporary figures such as the BESHT, Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzatto, the Maggid of Har and others.

51 Ha'am Torath Yisrael, pp. 24-29.
52 Ibid.
Maggid of Meshireikh, or Rabbi Nathan Adler were viewed by the members of their circles as charismatic figures who transcended the normal bounds of concept and were in contact with upper realms which existed beyond the domain of the sages. The HEBREW defined his spirituality as "like someone who conducts himself on a level above that of nature," and his disciple, the Maggid of Meshireikh said of him, "Why are you surprised that he had a revelation of Elijah and even achieved a very high spiritual ascension," whereas the Ḥasidim Sefer, Rabbi Nathan's disciple, cites his teacher as saying, "when I have an ascent of the soul into the Garden of Eden I always see..." In the Hasidic tradition Rabbi Natan is described as the one of whom Rabbi Ermekiel said, "for many years such a holy soul, as Rabbi Nathan Adler has not come into the world, except for our Teacher, Rabbi Israel the Bei Shemen, of blessed memory."53

Paranormal phenomena are known to be interpreted according to the status of the individual to whom they are attributed, according to the religious significance inferred from them, and according to the cultural context of its time and place. These phenomena which are interpreted as manifestations of the holy spirit are a group which cultivates a mystical atmosphere, and which arouses an attitude of respect and awe there, can be viewed as a manifestation of confusion and deceit in another group, one which fears them and adopts an attitude of contempt and criticism against them. Even so, the evaluation of these phenomena may depend upon whether they embody a threat to the existing order or whether they arouse opposition to the prevailing leadership.

It seems that this fear of the claim of unlimited authority on the part of the spiritually inspired, who were viewed by those around them as possessing the holy spirit, as well as fear of the new ritual expressens which were forged for spiritual and mystical purposes were the motivations behind the great majority of the writings of excommunication issued against the various Hasidic circles.

Suspicion, hostility, and criticism were stoked at the moment when contact with the upper worlds transcended the limits of the exalted individual or left the domain of the elite few acting with the community's consent. As the concerns of such a prophetic group became a phenomenon with social significance, the community responded disingenuously. Dreams, which in Rabbi Nathan's circle were an expression of prophetic revelation and the inspiration of the holy spirit were, in part, interpreted exactly differently by the

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53 See Talmud Ta'anit 32b, 33a. Ḥasidim, id. 56. See also Maggid Divrei on Israiel, Knesset 1781, Ḥasidim, id. 22, Orḥei Sefarim, id. 127, pp. 43-46. See also Hirsch's statement that Rabbi Nathan and also interpreted by his students as a natural works; Ḥasidim, Knesset 1781, R. H. 555, 556, and of the spiritual characteristics of exalted spirit like him in Schechter, "Mishna, "Miẓpah ha-Ḥa-Ḥayam," in Mijrajim v. Maḥazar, pp. 15-20; Or Ḥasan transition in id. See also Talmud, Frankfurt a. M. 1992, p. 7-116.
community leadership. Rashi (1040-1110) and his group were depicted as deceitful
tricksters. Quite possibly, the common view that linked prophecy, revelation, and
frightening dreams with the Sabbatian movement; on the one hand, and
which attributed visionary dreams and fraud to the Frankist circles on the
other, led to excessive severity in judging the significance of dreams in
Adler's circle. In any event, it is certain that the close proximity of Jacob
Frank, who stayed, as noted, in Otwock during the last 1780s, and who
was known for his dreams, prophetic visions, and manifestations of the holy
spirit, which took place in his circle, could not encourage a pious, tolerant,
or moderate assessment regarding the visionary revelations and prophetic
dreams of Rabbi Nathan's circle.

We must then conclude that the various pietistic circles, possessing
toxic, mystical, and ecstatic tendencies, which were the subjects of the
Kabbalistic-Hasidic tradition in Eastern and Western Europe during the
1770s and 1780s, were persecuted and excommunicated not because of what
they actually were, but rather because of what their opponents deemed
them to be in the light of the Sabbatarian-Frankist threat which was then being
revived with unprecedented force. The limits of demarcation between the
Kabbalistic, Hasidic, Sabbatian, and Frankist circles, all of which called
themselves "Hasidim," became increasingly blurred in the consciousness of
those who were observing from without. Their common elements, anchored
in the Kabbalistic tradition and the pietistic-Hasidic ones, were many, far
outweighing the shadings which distinguished them. Hence, the leadership
felt that it was proper to wield the weapon of excommunication against all
spiritual separatists. Every tendency to spiritualistic autonomy transcending
the authority of the community was banned, with no attempt to distinguish
among the essential differences between those who were delving deeply into
the mystical heritage and penetrating the depths of the tradition and those
who had passed beyond it and constructed a new-spiritual world on its ruins.

The fate of Rabbi Nathan Adler, like the fate of the Hasidic members of
his generation in Eastern Europe who viewed themselves as continuing the
Holy Kabbalistic tradition and as profound innovators under its inspiration
and within its confines, was largely determined by the apocalyptic significance
that was enhanced, to it and by the authoritarian state made of that tradition by
Sabbatians and Frankist circles, who acted at the same time and in the same
place in the name of the same Kabbalistic and Hasidic tradition.

55 On prophecy, revelation, and manifestations which were bound up with the Sabbatian movement, cf.
O. Saphir, "Ha-Tzva'ah ha-Sabbaitit," in: Shelomo Leibowitz, pp. 70-79.
56 Yonah's dreams are mentioned in Oliver Beswick in passim 216, 2201, add 2201 and in many
other places. See Leuch, p. 69, par. 7; p. 72, par. 72; p. 82, par. 93 at passim. Cf. "Festumnet Dov
Ha-Meir ha-Shikhan," in: Senna, p. 216, and see Saphir, Shelomo Leibowitz, p. 115.